

Rodbell Bio

Martin Rodbell, 1925-1998

A Baltimore native and the son of a grocer, Martin Rodbell was born December 1, 1925. He attended Baltimore City College, a public high school, and then Johns Hopkins University. World War II interrupted his studies there; he served as a Navy radioman with the Pacific fleet. After the war, Rodbell returned to Johns Hopkins, and switched to science, from French literature, as a vocation. At the University of Washington, in Seattle he received his Ph.D. in biochemistry, and then came to the National Institutes of Health as a research biochemist in Nobel laureate Christian Anfinsen's laboratory at the National Heart Institute, now called the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Rodbell worked at the NIH from 1956 until his death in 1998, first in the National Heart Institute, then in the National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases, now called the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. He was scientific director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) from 1985 to 1989.

For a more in depth look at Martin Rodbell's life and work, visit the National Library of Medicine's "[Profiles in Science](#)" site and the [Nobel Foundation's site](#).

"To my chagrin the chemistry course required a more sophisticated level of understanding than I had experienced. The same was true of physics. The result, I switched to French literature as a major....Only after graduation, taking an extra year for studying advanced physical chemistry and related courses, did I understand that I was capable of being a scientist. I was nearly 25 years old!"

- *—Martin Rodbell, letter to Dr. Leon Lederman, December 30, 1995*



Martin Rodbell while serving in the Navy Courtesy of the Rodbell Family

"All day I listened to Morse code. If that isn't preparation for looking at cell signaling, I don't know what is."

- *—Martin Rodbell on his Navy days (1946)*



Photograph dated 1994 Courtesy of NIDDK

*"The real reasons reside
with the people, with ideas, and their exchange.
With the freedom to be wrong without fear
the ability to conjure theories as if a seer
Without the constant overbearing reviews
by so-called Peers.
The philosophy of Science,
That seedbed of Truth and Beauty Survives in our midst
Not because of our administrators I insist
But because of our overwhelming passion
To know and understand in individual fashion.
And, with insatiable curiosity,
To reach for the unattainable goal
In the face of the public's
Unceasing desire to have cures for AIDS, common colds.
And the unrelieved fear of cholesterol..."*

- *—Martin Rodbell, on why he stayed at NIH in
"The Final Farewell"
Or
The Last Ode From Building 6"*

Acknowledgements